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ABSTRACT

This report describes the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Library System's process of planning for a long-term literacy program for the metropolitan Oklahoma City/County area. The collection of data on community needs through interviews with local organizations and individuals and an extensive search of print and/or computerized information sources is noted and the findings are discussed, including the number of illiterate adults and literacy education programs in the community, and the level of interest expressed by both organizations and individuals in participating in a cooperative literacy education program. Literacy definitions and standards are also considered, including behavioral or institutional literacy, socioeconomic standards, internal or personal standards, and the maintenance of achieved skills and knowledge. Eight guiding factors are then identified for developing a community program to address literacy training. Finally, a description of the design of the local literacy project includes the decision of the library to employ a full-time adult education staff member to aid in the formation of a local coalition for literacy training; the use of 1980 U.S. Census data to develop a zip code map depicting geographic areas most likely to require literacy services; and the development of a 5-year, 3-phase plan of organization and development. Two diagrams of Oklahoma City/County areas in need of literacy training and a 42-item bibliography are included. (KM)

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COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY TRAINING

for the

LOCAL COMMUNITY

Metropolitan Library System
Planning Services Office

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June, 1986

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Increasing attention is being paid to the problem of illiteracy in recent years. Numerous persons and organizations of national influence are not only recognizing the problem but participating in efforts to alleviate it, including efforts by such as the American Library Association, B. Dalton Booksellers, American Broadcasting Company, Public Broadcasting Serivce and many others. Several state governments and state libraries have become active supporters and participants. Many of these supporters and organizations encourage local public libraries to assume leadership roles in their communities to develop/carry out literacy programs.

The typical public library appears to be a logical entity to serve as a focal community organization to lead in advocating, organizing, and facilitating a local long-term and effective literacy program. Often the local public library exhibits these characteristics that are needed in such a leadership role:

1. Possesses a permanent base of funding;
2. Holds community literacy as a high priority goal;
3. Has no turf to protect as a primary provider of education and so does not threaten other local organizations;
4. Already possesses resources important to a literacy program, such as relevant printed and other materials, buildings, staff, related equipment, and relevant existing community involvement through other activities;
5. Has established community credibility and recognition.

In January, 1985 the Metropolitan Library System in Oklahoma City adopted a goal to fill such a role in the metropolitan Oklahoma City/County area. For

a number of years the Library System had filled supportive roles in delivering adult basic education and literacy training through cooperation with public and others. The continuing, and perhaps even growing, illiteracy rate in the community showed that a leader organization, such as the Library System, was needed to serve as an advocate and to help coalesce community organizations into a long-term, effective literacy program.

Numerous answers needed to be developed so that the Library System could enter into some sort of advocative, coordinating and leadership position with a chance of effectively serving the community in delivering a literacy program within the available resources of the Library System. The Library System had operated within close funding restraints since its formation slightly over 20 years ago. The System gained an increase in its basic amount of funding through property tax by a special community election in 1982. The level of annual funding had experienced steady increases of 4 to as much as 7 or 8 percent per year of the previous year's budget for many years. However, the demands for library services from the community have continued to press the budget for addition of new or expanded services. At the time of beginning the consideration of a local literacy project, the System already operated 11 full-service libraries, 5 bookmobiles, over 100 book deposit sites, 4 smaller and less than full-service libraries, and a books-by-mail service. The Library System serves a geographic area that slightly exceeds 700 square miles and has the second lowest population density per square mile of any community in the nation.

Within the roles that the Library System might ultimately identify and decide to fill, the library staff and organization needed to be prepared, through background research provided them and educational preparation, to deal with literacy professionals, potential learners, other organizations and to be

knowledgeable enough to help plan major programs, oversee and evaluate broad programs and their results, assist in selecting materials and hardware and other roles that might evolve. Major among the areas of knowledge needed by library staff were:

1. The extent of illiteracy in the local community;
2. The extent and types of activities and resources already devoted to working with illiteracy in the community and the progress or success rates of any existing programs;
3. Who and how many persons are currently being served;
4. Major roles needed in a large local literacy program that the Library System could and should reasonably fulfill;
5. Identification of existing, potentially useful community resources that are currently under-utilized or not utilized at all;
6. Major elements necessary in a successful local program, and elements to avoid, in order to be successful. Some possibilities were training techniques, recruitment of learners and volunteers, evaluation of learners and program results, location and description of desirable learning sites;
7. Possible costs and funding;
8. Other factors as determined through the serendipity of the planned research procedures.

RESEARCH STEPS AND FINDINGS

Local persons and organizations who were involved or interested in doing something about illiteracy problems were interviewed. These included sources such as the Oklahoma City Literacy Council, reading teachers and specialists, personnel of selected state level departments and other reasonably obvious sources, who often referred us to other and less obvious local or regional sources.

We also conducted an extensive search of local, regional and national sources for the printed and/or computerized information. A number of computerized national databases were searched. Recommended sources from printed bibliographies and interviews were vigorously pursued.

The number of functionally illiterate adults in the community proved to be an elusive number, but significantly large in any case. The lowest estimate, as provided by the Oklahoma City Literacy Council, was 25 percent of the adult population (about 151,000 persons). The only other estimate found available was from a recent survey by the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG). Their survey estimated that 37 percent of the local adult population were functionally illiterate.

Preliminary findings indicated that literacy education existed in Oklahoma City/County through these approaches: Laubach one-on-one tutoring and materials at the time. However, some of the Council volunteers expressed interest in the possibilities of using group tutoring, computer-assisted training and other techniques when and if feasible for them.

Another form of literacy training found locally available involved classroom-based training. The most common efforts were ABE/GED and English as a Second Language classes funded by the Oklahoma Department of Education. At the

time, 40 Learning Centers were funded by Federal and State money. Two of the learning centers operated in the local environment of Oklahoma County through the Oklahoma City Public Schools. One of the centers overlaps in adjoining Cleveland County.

Some classroom based training other than ABE/GED and English as a Second Language courses was found to be available in most local colleges and universities. These courses are designed primarily to be offered to and accommodate college/university students who have reading deficiencies. The largest program appeared to be that of the Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC).

OCCC offers Reading I to students who read at a rate below the fifth grade, and College Reading II to students who read below the eighth grade level. In the fiscal year 1985, 136 of their students enrolled in Reading I, while 82 successfully completed it. In the same year, 82 students enrolled in Reading II, and 43 of them completed the course.

Area vocational-technical schools had media centers for their students and reading specialists. For the most part, some assistance was offered in courses to the community for reading improvement but there were no concerted efforts at involvement in addressing the general problem of illiteracy in the community. One instance was found in which a learning specialist had done some limited community work.

Some other organizations were either working with adult illiteracy with some selected populations and/or were interested in working cooperatively with a broad community effort to deal with illiteracy. Some of those included were: Oklahoma Department of Corrections, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Urban Ministries, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, and the Opportunities Industrial Center.

A number of other organizations also expressed interest in working with or supporting the work of a coalition if it were formed. These included civic clubs, professional groups, institutions, private enterprise organizations and others.

Numerous individuals expressed interest in working with a local literacy coalition if it were formed. These offers included individuals who were willing to serve as training volunteers, literacy/reading specialists who were willing to offer limited volunteer services in training others and helping to establish and evaluate a local program, persons interested in either providing or helping to develop funding, and others.

A representative of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries recommended that the Library System sensitize its staff members to the needs of beginning readers and establish an easily recognized section of materials for beginning readers.

The major sources of information consulted provided the rich, voluminous information that is utilized by literacy professionals in developing standards to explain or define literacy and, therefore, illiteracy. It was possible to provide this information in a manner that will be useful for library staff and others in planning and carrying out a project by bringing the information together in one cohesive presentation.

LITERACY DEFINITIONS AND STANDARDS

Behavioral or Institutional Literacy

The adults who fall in this category are those who fail to pass tests or the institutional standards which are generally recognized by the community as authoritative. This includes failure to pass standardized written examinations, or failure to complete more than a certain number of years of formal education. Aliteracy, the lack of desire to read, is typically ignored.

The consensus of literacy professionals seems to be that behavioral definitions are a necessary evil. These definitions have facilitated valuable programs such as Adult Basic Education, and they are a political fact of life. On the other hand, the behavioral definitions encourage a reductionistic mentality which is offensive to many beginning readeeers. Moreover, behavioral standards lead to ignoring adults who need basic instruction while recruiting students with far less serious reading problems who are easier to locate and train (often referred to as "creaming").

Socio-Economic

The community and society-at-large determine these standards. This category includes major factors that relate to survival in the society without being significantly dependent on others. These standards frequently involve a variety of competency-based applications. These can include abilities to:

1. Complete applications for employment;
2. Read street and road signs;
3. Shop as a wise consumer;

4. Deal with such things as simple leases and contracts without assistance.

This socio-economic category dovetails with the issues that concern functional illiteracy, and deserves serious consideration. The strongest argument for focusing on the specific skills required to function in concrete social and economic circumstances is that many new readers are pragmatists who explicitly request such training. In such cases aliteracy may be remedied by economic motives (i.e., a promotion or job security), consequently, motiviation may be high.

Two disturbing aspects of these standards bear recognition before beginning a local literacy project. One is that efforts to combat functional illiteracy are susceptible to "creaming" by those who recruit and train them.

The other aspect is that little seems to be known by professionals about the type of reading required to be functional. The study found abundant testimony to the argument that current methods and materials used in literacy work are frequently divorced from the culture and workplace of non-readers, and that in the absence of a sound theory of literacy in vocational settings, traditional efforts to combat functional illiteracy remain largely arbitrary and open to skepticism.

Internal or Personal

This approach requires an attack on aliteracy. Literacy is required, in the words of the director of the Adult Literacy Initiative in order to "be all that you can be." This standard applies to large numbers of nonreaders who want

"to explore him or herself, to discover other people, to find respite, or to be startled."

Numerous literacy experts argue that if stereotypes of working people are abandoned, estimates about the numbers of adults requesting this type of education will rise. The elderly may represent the most visible portion of this category, but non-readers of all ages wish to read for personal fulfillment. Finally, in this rapidly changing world, the most pragmatic short-term strategy, even for a student with limited vocational reasons for reading, may be to take the time to learn for personal satisfaction. One researcher confirmed this hypothesis concluding ". . . would it not be more practical to emphasize educating for intelligent flexibility rather than engendering more and more competency based lists to match new and ever-changing job specifications?" The difficulty of such an endeavor should not be understated.

Maintenance of Achieved Skills and Knowledge

These are personally and institutionally defined. An awareness that all types of people, regardless of affluence, education or profession, will require new literacy skills in coping with the 21st century, is requisite in dealing with these needs.

ESTABLISHING A LOCAL LITERACY PROGRAM

A number of guiding factors in developing a community program to address literacy training were found and developed, including:

1. Development of an effective and efficient communtiy program that is comprehensive, is a long-term commitment to developing a coalition of local organizations, evolving recruiting and training methods and materials, seeking funding and other resources, and continuously adapting and changing to meet the changing needs of nonreaders;
2. Continuing, permanent local funding of a program will likely be necessary in the long-term. Several outside sources of start-up funding are currently active, such as B. Dalton, and Library Services and Construction Act, among others;
3. A large number of local volunteers will be an ongoing necessity for a successful program, and a permanent recruiting program will likely be necessary;
4. Services of local literacy/reading professionals will be vital to assist in developing entry evaluation of learners, establishing patterns and methods of instruction, training volunteer and other instructors, and so forth;
5. The program must be comprehensive and set a goal to reach and serve all persons in the community who need assistance, avoiding serving only those persons who are easiest to recruit and teach;

6. Four basic demographic factors have been identified that often predict persons who need literacy assistance: ethnic minorities, low income, age 65 or older, low level of formal education achieved;

7. Literacy training services should be as accessible to the daily lifestyle of the potential learners as is possible. This includes numerous sites located throughout the geographic area of residency of learners. Some major types of sites to be considered are:

A. Public library facilities;

B. Park recreation centers;

C. Churches;

D. Public school buildings for use by adults;

E. Trailer park recreation centers;

F. Retirement center recreation centers;

G. Off Campus or otherwise informal college facilities.

8. Most sources suggested that a coalition of community organizations and individuals who are interested in promoting, supporting, and providing adult literacy services should be formed as the method of developing and delivering a comprehensive local program. These should include local or regional sources of long-term funding as soon as possible. Though there is more external funding currently available than has ever been the case before, many sources felt that the allure of promoting local literacy efforts will likely soon fade for many sources of funds and they will go on to newer and more visible social issues.

THE LOCAL LITERACY PROJECT DESIGN

Based on the results of the research, it was recommended that the Library System should commit some resources on a long-term basis. The recommendations recognized the enormity of the costs involved in a comprehensive local program and limited resources for the System to enter large new programs. The Library System was encouraged to employ a full-time, permanent staff member with expertise and experience in adult education, emphasizing literacy/reading problems.

It was suggested that one of the first major assignments of the adult education staff member should be the formation of the local coalition for literacy training. It was also suggested that the work of the Library System in addressing the local illiteracy problem should be channeled through the projected coalition so that the scarce Library System resources were protected. This same approach could guarantee that a broad community-based literacy training effort would be established with strong potential for adequate local funding and needed project longevity.

The local literacy coalition should continue to employ the traditional educational techniques and materials now in use over the metropolitan Oklahoma City/County area. These learning situations include one-to-one tutoring; computer-assisted instruction and videotape-assisted learning; classroom group situations for learning, such as English as a Second Language and G. E. D.; and other electronic and mechanical teaching media.

The coalition should be prepared to develop and implement additional techniques and materials that may be identified as needed in attempting to serve all learners in the community. These may include group tutoring, use of oral history, rewriting of popular items (such as current sports news) into packages

that are of interest and appropriate for learners. These techniques may also include use of audiotape cassette recordings and radio or television broadcasts that are specifically designed to assist learners in a specific program and other printed materials.

Beginning work of the coalition should concentrate on areas of the metroplex that are likely to contain a significant number of persons needing literacy assistance. The geographic area should be of a size that is manageable with current resources of coalition members and one that a sufficient number and variety of sites (or potential sites that can be developed) to make learning accessible to area residents who may use the services.

A map of geographic areas in the community and each area's liklihood of requiring literacy services by using the four demographic factors previously mentioned was generated by selecting local zip code areas that met the criteria from the 1980 U. S. Census by zip codes.

The results of this search were recorded on a zip code map of the metropolitan area. The following symbols and legends were placed on the map and describe the findings (See Illustration 1):

"A" indicates that 3,000 or more persons who are age 18 years or older reside in the area and have completed 11 years or less of formal education.

"B" indicates that 3,000 or more persons who are age 65 years or older reside in the area.

"E" indicates that the total number of persons of ethnic origin other than "white" in the area represent 25 percent or more of the total area population.

"$" indicates that 4,000 or more households whose 1980 income level

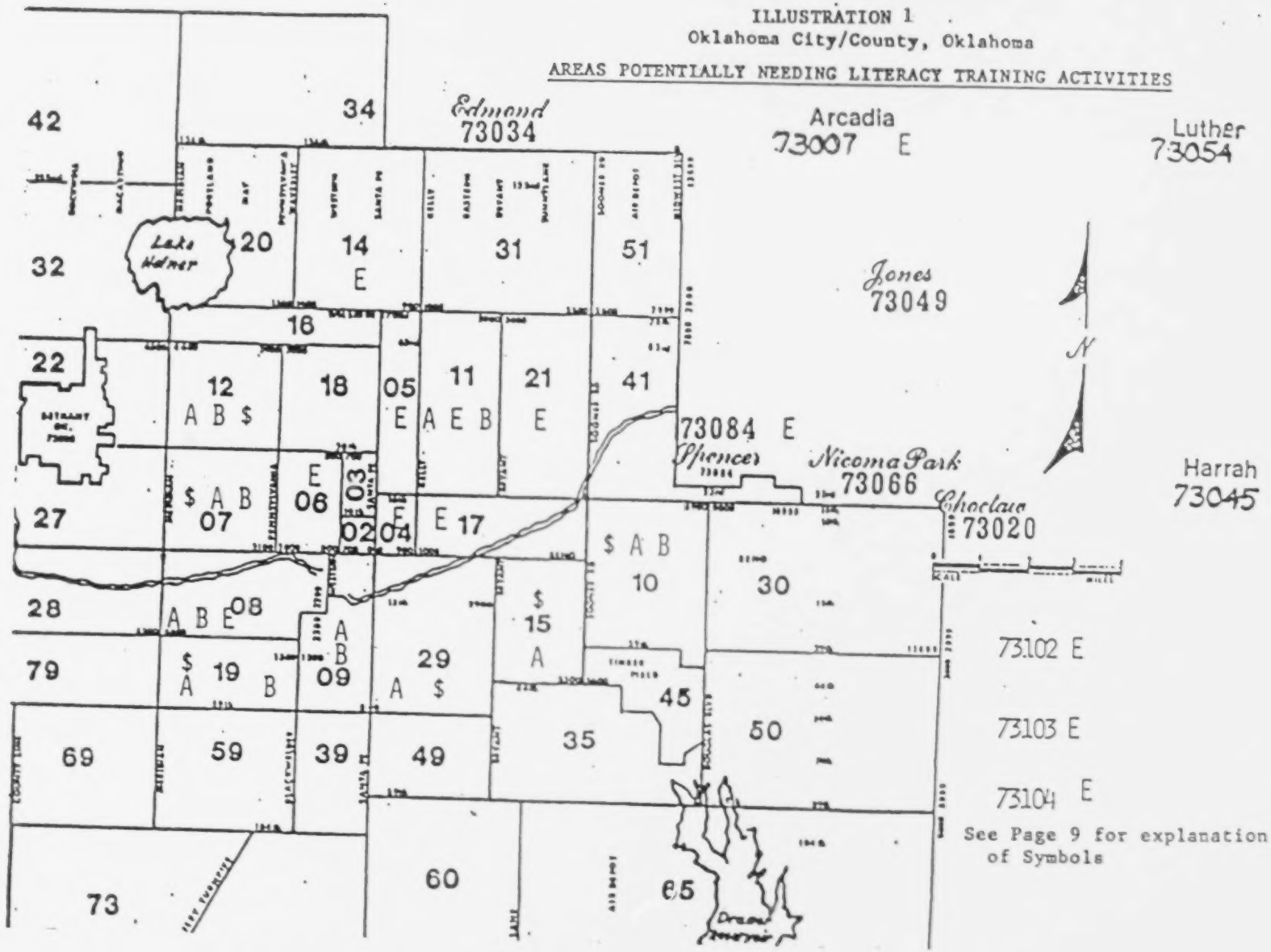
was $10,000 to $19,999 reside in the area.

The service area of the Library System includes a combination of urban, suburban, and rural zip codes and 20 municipalities. Six of the rural zip codes exist for rural municipalities that do not have continguous corporate limits with Oklahoma City or other cities within the metropolitan area.

We found that a total of 19 zip code areas (approximately 34 percent of the total metropolitan zip codes) fell within the threshold limits established for inclusion as an area that potentially contained more than the community average number of persons needing literacy assistance. Eleven of the 19 were included under the ethnic indicator requirements only, and two of these were rural communities. The remaining eight zip code areas met threshold requirements of two or more of the indicators. All of these eight areas fell within the older, urban parts of corporate Oklahoma City. A geographic area was proposed for the first stages of efforts by the potential local literacy coalition that includes five of the eight zip code areas, are mutually contiguous, and include three of the library buildings of the Library System (See Illustration 2).

ILLUSTRATION 1
Oklahoma City/County, Oklahoma

AREAS POTENTIALLY NEEDING LITERACY TRAINING ACTIVITIES



See Page 9 for explanation of Symbols

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ILLUSTRATION 2

The areas shown below in the metropolitan area were generated by selecting zip code areas from Illustration I as those most likely having larger concentrations of persons needing literacy training services. The areas are proposed as those which the literacy coalition should consider for its first joint efforts.

A plan of organization and development was also proposed for the local program with three phases that were estimated to require five years to complete.

Phase One

This phase could easily consume 12 months to finish which would include the following major activities:

1. Library System hire a full-time literacy coordinator;
2. Continue existing literacy activities;
3. Establish literacy training centers in two of the libraries located in the recommended beginning impact areas. Plan to implement methods and materials currently used and provide others as warranted or available;
4. Form a coalition of local community organizations to provide literacy services;
5. Begin expanding the number of trained tutors available;
6. Begin acquiring new high-interest, low-reading level materials;
7. Develop a recruitment program aimed primarily at the initial geographic target areas;
8. Develop needed learner intake evaluation procedures and subsequent individualized learning patterns based on intake evaluation, periodic progress evaluation for learners and evaluation of results for learners who leave the program;
9. Recruit and train persons to conduct evaluation;
10. Begin developing learning sites in the target areas that are needed in addition to those existing;

11. Begin seeking additional funding for expansion and long range continuation of the project.

Phase Two

This phase may require approximately 24 months to complete. Major objectives are:

1. Continue necessary activities begun in Phase One;

2. Develop any new services, techniques, and materials that were identified as needed in Phase One;

3. Begin working with local employers for employee referrals to literacy services developing a partnership relationship with employers;

4. Continue to refine the coalition for more effectiveness and maximum sharing of resources;

5. Begin planning for other geographic areas to be added to that program in Phase Three, depending on success rates toward the end of Phase Two.

Phase Three

This two-year phase is one of continuing to improve services and techniques developed in earlier phases, adding new activities and techniques as they are found to be needed. The coalition should seek to complete establishment of a firm funding base that allows it to plan for providing full literacy services to the entire community at the end of the fifth year. Recruitment of selected community organizations who have resources needed for the program should continue indefinitely. The coalition should be a stable, mature program capable of providing

services that individual learners require for as long as the needs exist.

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